

Linda Clair
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File 6c – Thursday afternoon discussion

Question: I've been feeling confused about my approach and intent. I remember retreats before and the pain was a lot more intense than it was now, but I felt like I struggled heaps with it and I would be fidgeting around and my mind just going crazy. And I feel that was sort of defeating in a way. It was like I was making it through these painful sits but it also felt a bit degrading or something – like I was getting beaten up and failing at the same time. Now I'm realising that the intensity of pain – it's really not intense compared to what I've sat through in the past. It's been very physical but I haven't had that burning, or the cool, the stabbing pains, and I don't know if I should drill down and be more firm. Because I don't want that loss of dignity where I'm squirming around; like it sort of backfired a bit when I was doing the three-hours and stuff. So I don't know whether to try and do it very gently and subtly – and just keep pushing a little bit, and wait for it to naturally sort of fall into where I do go for more pain – or to push it.

Linda: Well, it will change. It's a good question. What you felt before, it *feels* like failure, it feels like you're never handling it properly just by the fact that it's there and you're squirming and you can't accept it. But once you do fully accept it, it goes away anyway. So while it's there it's enough to just sit through that. Don't worry how you're handling it – you're still sitting there and that's the main thing. So that's the first thing – it wasn't a failure at all. Now, I'd say, do what you just suggested – soften a bit. If you want to still do... Well, there's only another day really. Have you been sitting right through? Someone told me you get up about five and start sitting really early?

Question: I've done a few days early in the morning, but even two hours hasn't been that intense some days.

Linda: That's okay. Don't aim for it to be incredibly, incredibly painful. Sometimes it's harder when it's not because you haven't got as much to work with. And when it's painful like that it just takes over everything. So in a way you're struggling handling it but there's no choice. So yes, it will become more subtle. It won't become easier but it will become more subtle. At times you still will get that pain, when you least expect it, it will come up. So I'd say do precisely what you said. Let it come up, and watch; be as alert as possible and just deal with it the best you can. So do that.

Question: I've got a question about a very strong emotion that's arisen during the retreat. It was an emotion or a response that I wasn't even aware of. And it's got to do with events that happened at work over the last two years. Because round about two years ago the Department I was in merged with another Department, and I was deputy head of that Department, and with the usual merger, positions are spilled, and they then filled from the top and then went down. So I applied for a high-level position and I was unsuccessful, and then a few months later applied for a middle-level position and was unsuccessful. And then went into a low-level position for three months, and that was going to be advertised a little bit later, so I was acting in that position.

And around about the same time I had a few personal issues. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and it was intermediate stage, and I had radical surgery as you know. Also, around about the same time, my mother-in-law had a stroke and she died. And then basically the day after the funeral I had the interview for this low-level position, and I was unsuccessful. So it really felt like a kick in the guts and it was a pretty low point. I had all the emotions of being angry, and, "It's unfair," and all that sort of stuff.

So I suppose for the last twelve months I've been thinking about retirement, and we've had discussions about that. And just before Christmas that low-level position that I was rejected from two years ago came up again. So I thought, "I'll put in for this, I'll put in an application." It was almost like a test-case, just to see how things were happening at work. I was in two minds about it because I was thinking of retirement. Anyway, put in for that and was unsuccessful. So the next week I told them I was retiring. But when I heard that "unsuccessful" response for that final and fourth rejection, my response really was just one of disappointment and acceptance. Because I'd been thinking of retirement and it was a test case and therefore it didn't really matter. So I thought that was the end of it – that disappointment and a little bit accepting of it.

So Sunday night – this is after sitting in the front row – Sunday night in the middle of the night this intense anger appeared. It was just intense anger over that final rejection. So it had been rejection, rejection, rejection over the two years. And it really came out of nowhere because I really didn't see it at the time. So that was pretty intense on the Sunday night, and then it's come and gone during the week. The next two days it really wasn't there – the day after that, after sitting in the front row, I had an incredibly clear afternoon, for three or four hours it was actually very few thoughts, and if the thoughts came I could turn away very easily. Incredibly clear, then all of sudden the fog came in and I was back to normal. So it didn't seem to affect that, that intense anger. And then last night I was awake and I wasn't even thinking of all this business, it was quite pleasant, but then the anger came back again, quite intense. Even today that anger is still bubbling away.

So I suppose the question is, as we go along with the practice – you've mentioned many times that as you go along you often see that you don't react as much to certain events. Or what you think you might react to you don't, or it's not a big deal. So I suppose that's what I genuinely had just before Christmas when I was unsuccessful for that final position. It was a genuine one of disappointment. But I think deep down there was this anger, coming from the ego, real deep anger about that final rejection. So I'm just wondering, as we're going along the path and you see a bit of progress where you're not reacting as much to certain things, that there could be real reactions that are actually quite deep, that you don't see, that you might have to deal with that further down the track. Even though you're not seeing them now, further on you might have to address some of those reactions that you thought just weren't there.

Linda: You can never assume anything. And even once you've realised it's not like there's going to be no reactions. I was just talking about that competitiveness thing and at times I was surprised at how strong it was. So probably what happened over those two years you had quite a few really intense things happen – boom, boom, boom. And you didn't have the space and the time to really sort it out because something else would happen. Not that you-think-about-it sorting out, but just to let it sink in, and to be able to react to it. Because something else would happen, like your mother-in-law, and it would need your attention, and the operation, and that needed your attention, and then that took quite a while to recover. So yes, often the deepest stuff that comes up, that deep anger or sadness, or whatever, can be an indication that you are getting closer. You

can see it as something – “Oh, I’m reacting really strongly so that means I’m still really out of it, I’m still into my ego.” But when some of that really, really deep anger comes up – and it wasn’t caused by those events, it was triggered by those events, and it triggered something very deep within you – it can just be an indication that you are getting closer, because it’s stuff that’s been covered up and repressed and glossed over for years and years and years. It might be stuff from your very early childhood.

Question: Yes, because that whole concept of acceptance and rejection and the ego, for me like for most people, it’s pretty big. And I suppose I didn’t realise how big it really was. You know you think you’ve getting there and you’re not.

Linda: You think you’ve got a handle on it. You think you’ve got some idea how big it is. You’ve got no idea. Even now you’ve got no idea. I’ve got much more awareness of it now, but before, as long as you’re still to some degree controlled by your mind, and in that pen created by your mind – or that you’ve created – you just have got no idea. Because it’s only when you’ve out and out for good that you really realise how huge it is. And it’s incredible, it’s just incredible.

Question: I never thought I had a big ego, (Some laughter) well, I sort of did know I had a bit of an ego, because the role I was doing requires a pretty good ego. I thought I’d chipped away, I thought half was gone. But I think it’s like tip of the iceberg – you just don’t see it.

Linda: It is, and what you’re describing is something very, very deep and very significant, but it’s still the tip of the iceberg. And you think you’re just about there, and you think, “Wow, this is great.” But then, when it actually happens, you realise you genuinely didn’t, couldn’t, you just can’t have any idea. But until that point – of course it’s significant, and it’s necessary, and it’s chipping away, and big chunks fall off. But then when you see the whole thing you realise you were just seeing this little thing above the water and beneath is this huge thing. And that’s what goes. And when that goes... But you have to chip away at it until that point, that is the real turning point, where all the dominoes fall down and that’s it. But even then there’s still a bit there. And that’s sort of difficult because you feel, “Oh, that’s it.” But there can still be a bit of arrogance and ego there. And it’s very important to acknowledge that. So just expressing this like this will do something very significant to you as well.

Question: Yes, I knew I had to talk about this. Particularly today, because it just wasn’t going and I knew it wouldn’t go until I did something about it.

Linda: It’s one of the beauties of, I can see now, and the advantages of not having interviews, because it is forcing people to express things that they feel are incredibly private. And they are in a way, but in a way nothing is that private. Believe me, I’ve heard it all. (Laughter.)

Question: That’s right, and in the typical Department merger and the spill of positions – probably many, many people here have gone through the same thing.

Linda: Yes, but admitting how affected you were by it is a big thing to admit in your position. So yes, it’s a big thing to talk about. For people to talk about their innermost emotions, and get upset in front of a whole crowd of people is a big thing, and it’s a great thing. So thank you.

Question: The big thing is Friday was when I retired so this is day six of my retirement. (Much laughter and clapping.)

Question: How does it feel?

Question: Fantastic, apart from ego. (More loud laughter.)

Question: I'd like to thank you for all that stuff about your job and everything because I've been going through similar things. It was inherent in my question about judgment and dealing with the arts. And that often ends up in power struggles. So I've been feeling incredible anger that's come along and I'd thought it had disappeared, or I'd managed it, and then it came back again. Or I'd be woken up in the middle of the night with a whole train of thought, which is my suffering is it not? The fact that it's like a machine that goes on and it wakes me up. And this morning I was so angry in the first sit and underneath that a whole lot of pain came up underneath, which I've learnt is a fairly usual process for me. But what surprised me is that it came back again after a couple of days. I thought it had abated a bit but it hadn't really, but this time I felt a whole lot of pain with it, which was a relief, but I'm probably not out of the woods yet, because I notice there is a certain habit energy about the suffering thoughts. Like a train has worn a groove into the brain as it were. To turn that round somehow, or I don't know if it just goes eventually.

Linda: It goes eventually. It is a lot to do with the brain, and pathways in the brain, and changing the whole thing. The groove is not permanent; it doesn't need to be permanent. I don't know if I'd call it a groove. It's like we've filled up our brain with all this unnecessary stuff and we're cleaning it out and clearing it out. A lot of the pressure that you tend to feel in your head is, I feel, to do with the brain. It becomes very clear and spacious, and in that sense you become much more intelligent, because you're not clogging up this brain, this computer, whatever you want to call it – it's not just a computer, it's something much more amazing than that – with all this unnecessary rubbish. So things come to you. There's this space and solutions come. Things come to you just within that space, rather than traveling around in circles complicating it even more, it all becomes incredibly simple and clear because it's not clogged up with memories. And I know there's a part of the brain that's devoted to memory and that changes. But it's not like you can't operate because there's no memory; there is memory, that part is okay, when you need it. But you have to trust that it will arise when you need it, that everything is there when you need it.

So gradually, gradually you have to chip away at it. Change your habits. See that it's an addiction. Thinking is this developed addiction and we're withdrawing from it. And there will be withdrawal symptoms of course. But gradually, gradually, as you feel when you're withdrawing from something physically – it's the same sort of feeling – where it hurts but you sense that something is clearing out as well. So it's a really interesting thing.

Question: The conversation you were having with P. about chipping away, things getting gradually clearer. Not saying this is what I want to do, but if one were to stop practicing, does that all unravel? Or is that a cumulative effort? Does that stay with you somehow?

Linda: It stays with you. It's not like you have to start at the beginning again – it's there. And people often stop for a while and do things that in their karma they need to do and then usually, especially if they're at a certain point, they pick it up at some other time. And it's like riding a bike;

you just come back to it and start. But it's not like you lose anything. I feel it is a cumulative thing, so yes.

Question: I had that feeling but I was keen to know what you think.

Linda: A realisation is real. So it's not just a theory or an intellectual thing that you forget. It's something that's real in your body, that your body will never forget.

Question: And I guess so is that inexplicable urge to somehow progress and move beyond this state I'm in. I guess it first visited me when I was quite young. And I lost it from time to time, and it always comes back somehow. It finds me again for one reason or another.

Linda: Yes, that's what will happen. And different people need to do different things in this life. And it's how it is, different ages. Some people start when they're M.'s age. I didn't really start till I was thirty-seven. Before that I did things, but I didn't see them as spiritual, and I wasn't particularly interested in meditating. I think partly because I sensed that once I got into it that would be it, and I had other things I needed to do.

Question: Yesterday I think you said something about there are different levels of thinking or mind or thoughts? I wanted to ask you about that.

Linda: Well, when you first start meditating you often have a honeymoon period where everything is smooth and rosy, and it's really affecting you. You can have some quite amazing experiences. Usually that's just the surface layer of thought, thinking peeling away, and you're not aware of what's underneath. That's how it often is for a while in the beginning. I feel like it's some sort of trap that life gets you into, and before you know it you're sucked into this web and you can't get out. So that honeymoon period changes and then you start to see that there is more stuff there – a deeper layer of thinking – and it's going to take work or something to be free from it. That's often when people go, "No, this is not for me," or they become fascinated and keep going. So it just gets more and more subtle. There are deeper more subtle levels of past in you, in your body.

Question: That was what I was going to ask you. Stuff like, "My god, where did that come from?" and it's such a long time ago.

Linda: Yes, things like that, it's like the mind has this storehouse of things. And you're going along and it goes, "Ah, I'll get her, or him." Pull this out, and before you know it you're going, "Where did that come from?" or you're feeling really emotional, and it takes you into that. So that can happen at any time; you need to stay very alert and not assume anything. But I'm not saying don't enjoy those periods that are very soft and lovely and clear. It's not like you're looking for trouble, but it can appear at any time, so don't attach to any state. Even stillness, don't become attached to that where you are pushing stuff away and not allowing it to come up. Allow things that need to come up to come up. Because you think, "This is the ideal state, this is what I have to hang on to."

Question: It's very hard to let go a good sit.

Linda: It is. What I used to do sometimes was when there was a state like that happening that was very attractive and very pleasant, rather than going towards it and really getting in to it – it's hard to describe how I did this – I'd come back from it a bit. Almost like, "I'm not scared of losing this, I'll

step back a bit from it.” Often it would intensify by doing that. It was like I was facing my fear of losing it by, rather than going towards it, stepping back from it. So we get taught if there’s something you want, you go for it and you attach to it and hold on to it as hard as you can. But this is a bit different because you step back a bit when you see yourself starting to attach to something you step back a bit. And it’s just as hard for something pleasurable or painful. Painful is just as attractive in a strange way as pleasure – you know, drama, suffering, going over really traumatic events at work, or whatever. Both of them are equally attractive.

Question: This is three years from when I got my zafu at the first seven-day here. I guess, at least the last twelve months, every retreat I do, the next retreat I’m ahead. I feel I’m making progress. So the last retreat was that two days in Sydney. And I took away from that what you said – when I do my meditation practice at home, when I set the timer, to not stop early, to wait until the time elapsed. Most of the time I go to the timer, but I made the intention that I would stick with it, and between the last five or six meditation retreats I’ve had no idea when the end was going to come – it might have been two minutes or five minutes or whatever. I wanted to get up and stop but I sat with it. It was incredible what happened. It was a bit like being on retreat in a meditation. It was intense and there was a feeling, “I’m progressing, I’m making progress.” Also, I try to meditate every day, and I only missed a couple of days. But I’m taking away from this retreat that I have to meditate in the morning, and every day.

On the way to this retreat I stopped at Halls Gap for three nights. And usually I don’t meditate on the Saturday when I drive up here, but I did for one hour, and I left a bit later than I normally would. But what happened on the drive here was that instead of driving flat out and stopping for a coffee or something to eat, I was doing all these little stops. Like I saw some different things. I turned off and went into a little town; it was really nice. I’ll probably do that next time and explore a bit on the way here.

The retreat has been fantastic. You set the tone, you made it clear to, “Stop looking around”. I haven’t had light bulb moments but I’m very clear. I’m getting to clear places, where the thoughts come in – might be sentences, sometimes a paragraph, not just one thought – but yes, I feel clear. And also the pain has been intense. I have experimented with – not enduring the pain, but to be curious about it and just look at it, and it does go away. Because you want to get rid of the pain, but you don’t want to get rid of the pain by doing the practice, so it’s a fine line.

Linda: Yes, you don’t want to be free from your pain, you want to be free from your suffering, and there is a difference. So suffering is a reaction to pain. But once you are free from your suffering *then* the pain goes. But the pain becomes fascinating and the way you deal with the pain becomes fascinating. It’s great what you said and what you said about between Halls Gap and here. Even though it sounds, you might think, trivial it’s not. It’s a genuine change in some habitual behaviour and it happened naturally without you consciously going, “Oh yes, I’m going to do this and that.” It just happened.

Question: Like you said, not having an interview – this is my interview. I appreciate it, I’m grateful.